

# Three ways to die in Babyland

Written by dreamkatcha. Any related videos, as always, can be found on my YouTube channel.

None of this would have been possible without the fantastic resources generously provided by immensely talented emulator authors, and communities such as Hall of Light, Lemon Amiga, Lemon 64, World of Spectrum, Moby Games, World of Longplays and Recorded Amiga Games. Thank you for your tireless dedication to preserving the history of gaming.

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If you've ever felt that what the Amiga lacks is a realistic baby-minding simulator you may have missed out on Loricel's Baby Jo. In contrast to Brat, he doesn't make any attempt to be cool in the stereotypical '90s sense, so there's no attitude, shades, gold chains, or leather biker jackets in sight. He's simply a nappy-wearing tot who's gone for a wander beyond the city limits and got a bit out of his depth.

It's your objective to guide him back to safety and into the loving embrace of his maman, hence the 'Going Home' subtitle.



This will entail traipsing through gardens, parks, and inexplicably, a gloomy cavern. There must have been some blockade above ground forcing Jo to head south. That'll be it I'm sure.



Reminiscent of Wonder Boy in its pacing, gameplay and aesthetics, you chuck a limited number of rattles to fend off nature's fiercest adversaries; trees, flowers, clouds, dwarves, mosquitoes and some bloke in a box who calls himself Jack. He doubles up as a trampoline should you need a leg up.



Even the conferrer of all life on earth - the sun - poses as an enemy, although that's immune to your rattles, so not worth wasting any of your five 'rounds' on. Regardless, these can be replenished by scooping up the relevant collectable from the environment. Otherwise, you're as vulnerable as a newborn baby, appropriately.

Interestingly there are three different ways in which Jo can perish. Sustaining too many hits is the obvious one, signalled by the changing expression on his face as displayed in the HUD. From placid neonate, he cycles through slightly grumpy to mildly anxious, all the way up to morbidly depressed and distressed. At this point you find yourself thrashing about uncontrollably on the floor, and minus a life once you've pulled yourself together.



Jo's shrill caterwauling is enough to wake the dead and make them wish they *still* were. We're talking about Justin Bieber levels of discomfort and irritation here. Not just a bit of a blubber and snuffle. There's no better motivator for snagging first aid kits at every opportunity, and also staying out of harm's way in the first place!

Next up Jo needs to maintain his energy levels by slurping milk from baby bottles. Your supplies naturally drain as you go about the business of getting yourself unlost. Hit rock bottom and it's tantrum time again.

This being a baby-minding gig you'll also need to monitor the status of Jo's nappy. No really, I'm not kidding. This would normally be the cue to point out that 'Going Home' is a French game, hence predictably weird. Not me, I wouldn't dream of it. I don't believe in lazy stereotyping. And anyway I *know* some French people and if I overstepped the mark they'd beat me to death with their eternally on standby baguette.

As you mooch about munching on fruit and sweets, your nappy (I'm not going to say diaper, doh!) gradually turns blue to represent it filling up with, err... bubblegum flavoured cordial. The bluer it turns, the slower and less agile you become until you're waddling along like a baby ballasted by an uncomfortably bounteous nappy. There's an image for you to treasure. Your only hope is to replace said nappy with a fresh one, one that's not saturated with, umm... soft drink.

If you're going to swap nappies you may as well make the replacement a super-powered model. These are marked with a 'B' and allow you to leap further and run faster. Developers Imagex, clearly on a superhero kick have also laid on invisibility cloaks to complete the Marvel-ous selection of upgrades. Yeah, I know Superman is DC's IP. *You* come up with a relevant mixed metaphor about Marvellous Detectives. I'm waiting. ;p

In fact, the allusions to superhuman franchises were no mistake. Baby Jo on the PC Engine is subtitled 'The Super Hero', he takes potshots at Superman and Rambo in the magazine ads, and the Amiga version was part of a 'Super Heroes' triple pack compilation. Accompanying it was 'Prince De Perse' (Prince of Persia) and 'L'Aigle d'or, le retour' (The Golden Eagle, The Return).

On the back of the box, the preamble also hammers home the point...

## **The Super Hero**

"An explosion of humour and action in an irresistible arcade game!!

A hilarious screenplay bristling with gags and traps!!

An amazingly lively gameplay!!

For losing your sanity, there's just one answer"

Less Superhero-y are the balloons used to float up to higher ground, and bonus items shaken loose from trees or by unwrapping presents. Power-ups must be caught before they hit the ground and assimilated selectively because some turn out to be useless dead weights that are incompatible with our delicate baby's bonce.



As Michael Jackson once reassured us, "Yooou are not aloooone, I am here with yooooou". By 'I' I mean Daffy Duck obviously; he serves as your chaperone and adviser throughout. Although some of his advice is of the red herring, jokey variety, so best ignored. I told you this is an odd one. And it gets more oddererer still. 'Jock the Duck' - when the mood takes him - emerges from his *burrow* to offer you a carrot to wash down his words of wisdom.



Despite drawing the line at asking, "what's up doc?", he's clearly in the throes of a full-blown identity crisis. Daffy is zany, erratic and hyperactive so would have been quite a challenge to animate. Perhaps to compromise, artist, Daniel Hochard, plumped for the more chilled out mannerisms of Bugs Bunny with the appearance of Duck Dodgers. Well, whatever; some of the best things in life make little sense. Rich tapestry etc. etc.

Aside from the quirky Warner Bros plagiarism, what sets Baby Jo apart from the crowd is the charismatic animation. Abundant time has clearly been invested in making that as cute, intricate and convincing as was possible with the limited number of pixels at the artist's disposal.

When falling Jo flaps his arms in a futile attempt at flight. Realising it ain't happening, a sense of dread sweeps across his cherub-like face as he plummets like an Acme cartoon weight. Land him on top of a roaring fire and he shrieks in terror, skyrocketing into the blue yonder, nappy ablaze.

Jo parks his butt to glug down any milk he finds as if the last cow has just gone on a permanent strike, burping appreciatively to let you know he's ready to move on. Leave him standing idle and he sucks his thumb to stave off the boredom, much like one of those very young miniature people. *Babies*, that's the word.

Soaring into the sky dangling from a balloon Jo wiggles from side to side like a squirming worm caught in a puddle. Even his tuft of blond hair coils and unfurls as he saunters around the pic-er-nic area. The other levels too, I just wanted to make an out of the blue Yogi Bear reference for the helluvit. That sort of thing rubs off on you.



What *isn't* so endearing is the way he 'yips' with every jump (in the PC Engine version anyway), and belts out a 'yipee' upon grabbing each collectable. Why did no-one consider that this might get a tad annoying?

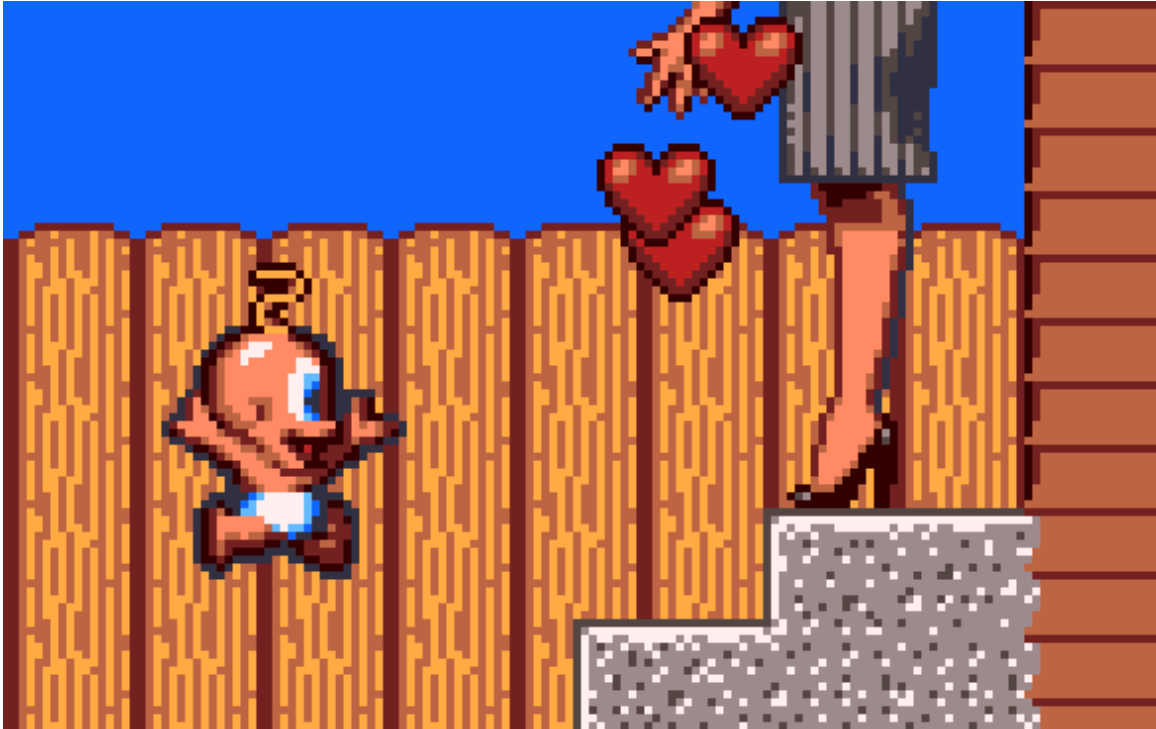
Music too is a bit repetitive. A perfect fit for the theme with its rinky-dink toy piano vibe, yet with so little variety on offer the perpetually looping ditty will soon send you doolally.



Jo's minimalist graphics gel neatly with the cartoony theme, all except for the heavy black outline framing many of the sprites. That's a bit awkward and overbearing without serving any obvious purpose. It's the kind of trick you'd see in a Speccy game to sidestep the notorious colour clash issue. I don't know why it would be necessary in an Amiga game.



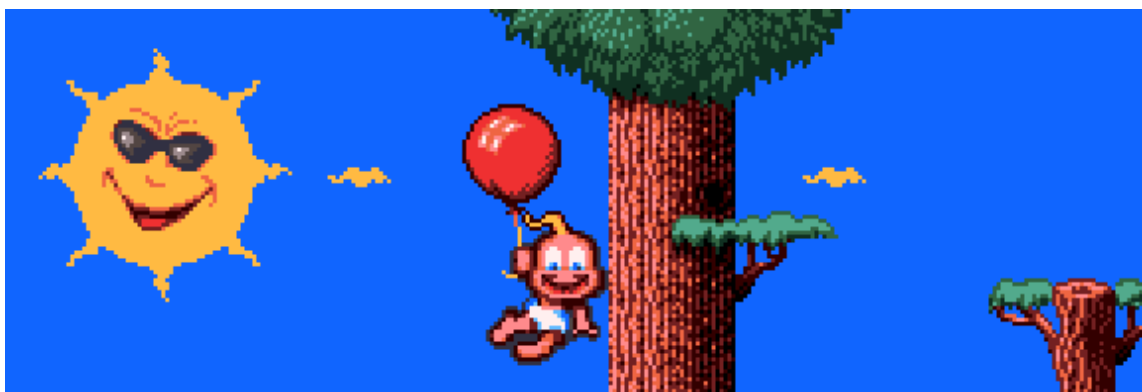
Guide Jo safely back home and on the doorstep he's greeted by his mother's legs in a scene reminiscent of vintage Tom and Jerry shorts featuring Mammy Two Shoes. I'm fairly sure she possesses a body, head and other peripheral limbs too, except they're unseen due to the low focus of the 'camera'.



Jo is embraced and taken inside, though when Jock tries to follow he's immediately ejected, mirroring Tom's treatment in countless animated shorts having been rumbled for committing some misdemeanour or other.

Walking-talking legs became a trademark of MGM's Tom and Jerry, and other cartoons such as Peanuts. It's thought this was because it saved the animator having to deal with voice-mouth synchronisation issues, and also helped to frame scenes to exemplify the perspective of the anthropomorphic animal or child stars.

In Baby Jo I suppose the same applies, though possibly it's just a suitable homage to complement the general theme. Either way it's nicely done, with sufficient charm to throttle a grin from the most battle-hardened of cynics.



Remembering for a second that at the nub of all this soppy schmaltz should be a playable game, Baby Jo is a bit of a let-down. Scrolling is jerky and the controls are equally stiff and laggy, making it unnecessarily difficult to take evasive action when descended on by hordes of wasps, for example. This being inevitable, and with everything else under the invulnerable sun enemy also having it in for you, it's a tougher challenge than you'd at first imagine judging by the seemingly Mothercare-inspired artwork.



Too tricky for very young kids and too limited in design for *veteran* gamers, who is Baby Jo really aimed at I wonder? Crawling on all fours alongside the pantheon of studiously evolved Amiga platformers this one is barely out of pampers.

Ordinary it's true, though certainly not worth ending it all over. Did I mention that the 'S' key is assigned to a suicide option? Somehow I don't think Superman would approve.

